VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd.

The United States is ready to spend $100 million to assist China and other countries impacted by the deadly coronavirus.

In a statement, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the commitment along with hundreds of millions of dollars donated by the American private sector demonstrate U.S. leadership in responding to the deadly outbreak.

Earlier, President Donald Trump praised China's President Xi Jinping's efforts to combat the coronavirus.

"They're working really hard and I think that they're doing a very professional job. They're in touch with World, the World, World Organization, CDC also."

Xi faces mounting domestic criticism following the virus-related death of a doctor who issued an early warning about the outbreak.

The Hubei Health Commission reported 82 more deaths in 2,841 new cases in the province Friday. That takes the totals in mainland China to more than 700 dead and 34,000 infected.

Several thousand people remain quarantined on cruise ships in Japan and Hong Kong after passengers tested positive for the coronavirus. Reuters' Beth Timmins reports.

Passengers have been confined their cabins on board the Diamond Princess ship for days it's possible two-week quarantine after an 80-year-old man who disembarked in Hong Kong was diagnosed with the virus.

Infected passengers take the total number of coronavirus infections in Japan to more than 80.

Meanwhile, another ship operated by Dream Cruises with 3,600 people on board remains stranded in Hong Kong after being denied entry by Taiwan which has moved to ban all international cruise ships from docking on the island.

And the Royal Caribbean Anthem of the Seas cruise ship docked in New Jersey early Friday carrying dozens of passengers hoping screened for signs of the virus.

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A decorated military officer who testified in President Trump's impeachment trial, Army Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman, the White House's top expert on Ukraine, has been fired.

Vindman was escorted out of the White House where he had worked on the National Security Council.

His lawyer David Pressman said in a statement the Purple Heart award winner was fired for telling the truth.

He remains on active duty with the U.S. Army.

Asked about Vindman's case, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said the Defense Department would welcome him back to the Pentagon.

"We protect all of our persons, service members, from retribution or anything, anything like that. So we've already addressed that in policy and other means."

Vindman testified to the House of Representatives impeachment inquiry in November that President Trump made an improper demand of Ukraine's president in a July phone call.

His testimony was part of the House effort to charge the president with abuse of power, a charge the Senate acquitted him of this week.

Meanwhile, another impeachment witness, U.S. ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland, said in a statement Friday night that President Trump intends to recall him from his post.

The U.N. human rights office says scores of civilians are being killed and wounded and hundreds of thousands are being displaced in Syria. Lisa Schlein has more from Geneva.

The U.N. human rights office says scores of civilians are being killed and wounded and hundreds of thousands are being displaced. In the first five days of this month, the agency has verified that at least 49 civilians, including 14 women and 17 children, have been killed. It notes at least 186 civilians were killed last month.

Agency spokeswoman Marta Hurtado says it is shocking that civilians continue to bear the brunt of the hostilities. She tells VOA all parties to the conflict are attacking civilians.

The U.N. says airstrikes by Syrian and Russian forces are responsible for most civilian deaths and injuries.

Lisa Schlein, for VOA news, Geneva.

Federal government investigators say there is no sign of engine failure in the deadly crash that killed Kobe Bryant and seven others. AP's Mike Gracia reports.

The National Transportation Safety Board says wreckage from the helicopter that crashed, killing Kobe Bryant, his daughter Gianna and seven others, did not show any sign of engine failure.

An investigative update from the NTSB says a tree branch at the crash site was cut, indicating the engines were working and rotors were turning at the time of impact. A determination on the cause of the January 26 crash could take a year or more.

The helicopter was ferrying the group toward a girls' basketball tournament at Bryant's Mamba Sports Academy when it slammed into a mist-shrouded hillside in Calabasas, California.

I'm Mike Gracia.

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